

# HEALTH

---

## **Facts about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be an extremely debilitating condition that can occur after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that can trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults such as rape or mugging, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.

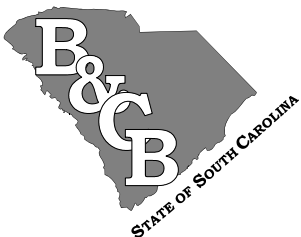
### **What Are the Symptoms of PTSD?**

Many people with PTSD repeatedly re-experience the ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, memories, nightmares or frightening thoughts, especially when they are exposed to events or objects reminiscent of the trauma. Anniversaries of the event can also trigger symptoms. People with PTSD also experience emotional numbness and sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, irritability or outbursts of anger. Feelings of intense guilt are also common. Most people with PTSD try to avoid any reminders or thoughts of the ordeal. PTSD is diagnosed when symptoms last more than 1 month.

### **What Treatments Are Available for PTSD?**

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy, group therapy and exposure therapy, in which the patient repeatedly relives the frightening experience under controlled conditions to help him or her work through the trauma. Studies have also shown that medications help ease associated symptoms of depression and anxiety and help promote sleep. Scientists are attempting to determine which treatments work best for which type of trauma. Some studies show that debriefing people very soon after a catastrophic event may reduce some of the symptoms of PTSD. A study of 12,000 schoolchildren who lived through a hurricane in Hawaii found that those who got counseling early on were doing much better 2 years later than those who did not.

**For more information about post-traumatic stress disorder, contact The Anxiety Disorders Education Program, National Institute of Mental Health at 301-443-4513.**



**STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS  
South Carolina State Budget and Control Board  
Employee Insurance Program  
October 2001**